

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

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19. (Currently Amended) A network for a subscriber's dwelling, set top box integrated with, or communicating with, a television, the set top box comprising:

an external line connection to an external signal source;
an internal wiring system connected to the external line connection, the internal wiring system distributing signals from a service provider throughout the subscriber's dwelling;
a back channel communications path that is different from the internal wiring system;

multiple set top boxes in communication with the internal wiring system, each set top box having a first input connected to the internal wiring system for receiving broadcasted content from the [[a]] service provider;

each set top box having a first output adapted to be received by an associated the television, the first output sending the broadcasted content to the television;

each set top box having a second input to receive message information from a user;

each set top box having a second output connected to an input of a second set top box using a the back channel communications path, the back channel communications path using an in-home wiring system that is different from the first input, each set top box the second output sending the message information from the second output to the back channel communications path for delivery to another of the multiple set top boxes to the second set top box, thus establishing a two-way intercom system with the second set top box between the multiple set top boxes; and

when the message information is received at at least one of the multiple set top boxes, a processor in a receiving set top box receives text information along with formatting information from a sending set top box, and the processor modifies a video signal received via the first input to the internal wiring system so that a displayed image is reduced in size to a first quadrant of a display of the television, thus leaving second, third, and fourth quadrants as blank margins, the processor causing a first message to be displayed in two horizontal, adjacent blank quadrants, and the processor causing a second message to be displayed in a remaining blank quadrant;

means for updating the message information using private data received from the external line connection to the external signal source; and

when a message is created, the message is first stored in memory for a time prior to being sent, then the message is retrieved from the memory and sent to a recipient's set top box,

a back channel communications path that is different from the first input,

wherein the broadcasted content is processed for an audio channel and, when the message information has audible content, the message information is processed for another audio channel and a volume of the broadcasted content is reduced below a volume of the message information being played.

20. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, wherein the message information comprises text information and formatting information, the formatting information being preset and fixed such that the user is unable to change the formatting information, the formatting information causing a reduction in a size of a displayed image to create a blank margin below the displayed image and another blank margin beside the displayed image, the formatting information causing the message information to be displayed in the blank margin below the displayed image and in the another blank margin beside the displayed image.
21. (Previously Presented) A set top box according to claim 30, wherein the audible message information comprises at least one of video information, text information, and a pre-formatted message.
22. (Previously Presented) A set top box according to claim 30, wherein the audio content is processed for a left audio channel and the audible message information is processed for a right audio channel.
23. (Previously Presented) A set top box according to claim 30, wherein the memory stores pre-made voice messages.
24. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, wherein for urgent messages the formatting information replaces the displayed image with a blank background and displays the message information.
25. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, further comprising memory storing pre-made voice messages.

26. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, further comprising a message waiting indicator.
27. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, further comprising another input adapted to receive information from a keyboard.
28. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, wherein the first input also receives a video signal and the set top box modifies the video signal to display a text message.
29. (Previously Presented) The set top box according to claim 19, wherein the audio signal is processed for a left audio channel and the audible message information is processed for a right audio channel.
30. (Currently Amended) A set top box integrated with, or communicating with, a television, the set top box comprising memory storing instructions for:

receiving broadcasted content from a service provider via a first input;
sending the broadcasted content to the television via a first output;
receiving message information from a user via a second input; and
communicating via a back channel communications path that is connected between a second output of the set top box and an input of a second set top box, the back channel communications path using an in-home wiring system that is different from the first input, the second output sending the message information to the second set top box, thus establishing a two-way intercom system with the second set top box [.,.];
reducing a displayed image to a first quadrant of a display of the television, such that second, third, and fourth quadrants are blank;
displaying a first message in two horizontal, adjacent blank quadrants; and
displaying a second message in a remaining blank quadrant;

updating the message information using private data received from the external line connection to the external signal source; and

when a message is created, first storing the message in memory for a time prior to being sent, then retrieving the message from the memory and sending the message to a recipient's set top box,

wherein the broadcasted content is processed for an audio channel and, when the message information has audible content, the message information is processed for another audio channel and a volume of the broadcasted content is reduced below a volume of the message information being played.

31. (Previously Presented) A set top box according to claim 30, wherein the memory stores instructions for receiving signals from a keyboard input.